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TALKS WITH MOLLY



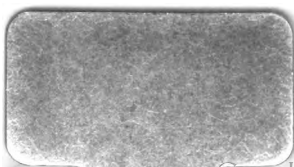
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TALKS WITH MOLLY:

OR,

AN OLD WOMAN'S THOUGHTS
ABOUT THINGS AS THEY ARE, AND AS
THEY SHOULD BE.

BY

MARIA WHITE.

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1877.



TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
The Lord Bishop of Chester

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED
BY ONE
WHO HAS GONE IN AND OUT
AMONG PART OF THE FLOCK IN HIS DIOCESE,
FOR TWENTY YEARS AS A WIFE,
AND TWO YEARS PREVIOUSLY AS A SISTER;
WITH THE PRAYER
THAT IT MAY BE HELPFUL IN GATHERING INTO
THE FOLD OF CHRIST
MANY LAMBS AND SHEEP.

ST. CHAD'S VICARAGE,
MALPAS, CHESHIRE,
NOVEMBER 24TH, 1877.

TALKS WITH MOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

Before the Mission.

"WELL, Molly, what's all this about the Mission? They talk of going ten days together to the meetings; wet or fine, hail, rain, or shine; afternoon and night. And they say it is not to hear our Parson, but strangers; such as those they used to call Evangelists in my mother's time; and we are to listen to them talking and preaching to us."

"To be sure, Jenny, and I hope you will go as often as you can."

"Why, you see, I can scarce for very shame show myself, after turning my back so long on the old Church, where father and mother bent their knees so reg'lar like each Sabbath."

"Stop, Jenny! that's the very object of the Mission next week, to stir us up if we have

settled down into lazy ways, such as you seem to confess. May be we shall be lifted out of the old ruts."

"But did you ever hear of one of these things before, Molly?"

"Why, yes. Janet has been telling me all about one she went to. She says it was a wonderful sight to see. There were all sorts gathered together: silks and satins sitting down along with poor folks like us; and heaps of young gentlemen, giving up their sports to come and hear the Good News."

"There, hold, Molly! It makes me quite provoked to think as everything must stop and give way to these strangers coming, when we've so much on hand every day of the week. Monday, you know, we want a bit o' company, if we don't go out somewhere to tea; then Tuesday, there's washing and drying; Wednesday, ironing and baking; Thursday, churning and mending; Friday, market; and Saturday, clean up. So there's no use of thinking as *I* can give up my time to it."

"Well, Jenny, I intend to try and plan my work beforehand, so that I can manage to go. I shall miss my washing on the Tuesday, and make extra bread this week, to be free and quiet like every hour I can, during that solemn time. You see, then I sha'n't be hurried and flurried at home; so as I can shut myself up a bit, late and early, and ask the Lord for His blessing."

"There you are again, Molly. Talk about being late? why you know the men and lads

come in so tired and hungry,—how can you expect them to dress up after a day's work, and turn out again in the dead dark night?"

"Dress up, Jenny? there's no need of that. A clean rosy face is always good enough; and a plain fustian will match any of the tidy ones. For my part I don't mean to make any change, as long as these winds hold so cold; but I shall just go as I am, and get my soul fed."

"But why make such a fuss, Molly, to go after these strangers? Better stay at home and keep the fire warm. Ye see I've not cared for these things."

"Strangers, Jenny! Never fear our Minister would be jealous at our going after them, though we have so often slighted his call. Mind you, it made the tears start, when I heard him give out at a meeting,

'Come ye sinners, poor and wretched.'

I can tell you I felt condemned: for I just minded how often the rheumatics, or the cow or the pig, or some other thing coming in the way, had made me so careless, and so content to bide at home."

"Well, to be sure, it isn't for the like of you to feel condemned. If it had been me, now—"

"You see, Jenny, I know more about myself than I do about you; and I knew I might have gone times and times, when I fancied I was best at home. So I there and then asked the Lord to help me seek Him: and where can I better do so than in His House? If I stay at home, something's

sure to want me, and I get interrupted a dozen times in an hour."

"Well, as to that, Molly, for the like of us I hold with having meetings in the houses, and just getting them done quick. You know, our prayers and hymns and preaching there are soon got through."

"How was it with the Master, Jenny? Didn't He go to the Temple, as well as to a solitary place, when He wanted to pray? I'm sure we ought to follow His example all we can. What was good for Him, must be good for us too. But there, I must go and tidy up, to be ready for our reading to-night."

"What's that, Molly?"

"Why, this winter, after the men's suppers, we all go into the chimney corner, and they read a chapter and sing a hymn; and then my old man thanks God for another day's mercies. But about this Mission. I suppose you have had tracts, same as we have, to tell you what it's all for."

"Yes, I have. And what like do you take it to be, Molly? Some of these tracts are a deal too learned for me; and I want to know exactly your mind about it, as I take you to be a sensible kind of a woman."

"My Bible cleared it all up to me, Jenny, as it does most things that puzzle me. My own sense had been over slow to see it all; till one day I lighted upon John iv. There I read, the woman of Samaria no sooner believed, than she left her waterpot, and went into the city, and invited the

men—(and I hope the women as well)—saying, ‘Come, see a Man which told me all things that ever I did.’ And they did as she said, and went and heard for themselves, and believed. And this is what we must do :—invite others, when we have found Him, that they may come and get the blessing which has made us happy.”

“Happy, Molly? Why, there would be an end of all my fun, I reckon, if I was to turn into a Mrs. Sober-sides.”

“Nay, Jenny, there is the beginning of much joy to those who receive the Word in faith, and learn to know their sins forgiven. And as to those who have known Jesus before ever this Mission came on, how will they be freshened up as they hear again the old Gospel message, so dear to them.”

“But I thought, Molly, it was some new thing we should hear of; some easier way to Heaven.”

“How can that be, Jenny, when the Master says, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me’? People nowadays seem to want all kinds of new-fangled notions: but for my part I am glad we are shut up to the one safe way of salvation. Do you remember, Jenny, when we were lasses at school together?”

“What, you mean Sunday School?”

“Yes: and there we both learned that hymn,

‘Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness.’

It always comes back to me now so fresh, and so

does one chapter after another out of my Bible, if I chance to lie awake at night. And there I'm sure to find some word of promise to help me, when I've got anything on my mind about Dick or Joe. But there, it wont do talking all day : I must just go and finish my work."

"And so you mean to go to these meetings, anyhow ?"

"That I do, Jenny, God willing. So mind, if you want to find me any evening next week, I shall be at the Mission services. My door will be locked most of the time. I am going to meet my Master there, and hear His Word ; and get all the help I can for His service. So now you know a little about it : but don't be content with what I say, but go and hear for yourself ; and come with me to the prayer-meeting Saturday night, and that will sharpen us up for the Lord's Day Services before the Mission."

"Thank you, Molly. You have always had patience with me in trying to make things plain : and I almost think I will try and keep the Mission week with you ; but I have haaps of work to do."

"We must some day find time to die. How then, Jenny ?"

"Hush, Molly ! more about that, when I dare face it."

"But suppose, Jenny, the Master calls either of us before next week ? Let us seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. Just try and tell Him all ; and He will abundantly pardon, and wash you whiter than snow. And so good day, old friend."

When Molly had done her work, she lit her candle; and fetching down the old family Bible, she began to look in it for what she could find about the children, who always occupied a large share of her thoughts. She remembered how Jesus had noticed children in His day, and how the mothers had pressed near Him to get His blessing. And surely then, she thought, He is not regardless now of the lambs whom He told Peter to feed then. She turned to Matthew xviii., and read there, how He rebuked the envy and strife of His disciples, by setting before them the example of a little child. Thinking much of Jenny, and remembering that she had some bairns in her home, she sallied out next afternoon when the kettle was hung upon the fire to be ready for tea, that she might say a word about the young ones going to the afternoon meetings, which were to be held specially for them, Jenny greeted her old friend with a warm welcome.

"Well, to be sure, Molly," said she, "are ye come all this way after me?"

"Aye, Jenny; and after the children too. In our talk yesterday about the Mission, I forgot to remind you to let them go to the meetings meant for them."

"The bairns! why, what can they take in, Molly?"

"Just you try them, and see if they don't bring home something of what they hear. I shall send our young ones, you may be sure. And the maidens must go to *their* special gather-

ing, too. I would rather deny myself, than they should miss it."

"Of all the women that ever I knew, you are the one, Molly, to ferret out everyone. I suppose you mean, our Eliza ought to go. 'Tis true, she is not over steady; but she is not worse than many others."

"Well, Jenny, I want my girls to be better in their lives than most of them about us. If I can see them good daughters, and chaste and modest in their ways, then I may hope that, with God's blessing, they may live to be good wives. I have just stepped up the hill to remind you to let yours go. Young men and maidens, old men and children,—and mothers too. And who knows, but the Lord may open windows in heaven, and pour out His blessing?"

"I have another word to say, Molly. You know, the cow's a going to calve; so it's sheer impossible for Father to go, for how could he leave the poor thing to herself?"

"Well, Jenny, I know your cow is worth a good bit of money, and there's no call to neglect her. But there are plenty of neighbours round, who can't get to all the services; and with a little contrivance one or other of them would look in, and see all's right with Daisy."

"And then how are our men to do without their hot dinner on Sunday, the only day when they can get it comfortable like?"

"Why as to that, we never have the dinner cold on Sundays ourselves. I have a notion that

something hot is more nourishing : and my John is not so strong as he might be. But we don't stay at home, for all that, on Sunday mornings. I always cook the meat the night before, and I do it with barley, so that we can do without potatoes. I set the dish and plates before the fire while we are away at morning service, so as I can get them at once when we come back at noon : and when we have done, I soon wash up the things, and off again."

"But why should you clear the things away on Sundays at all?"

"To keep the place sweet and tidy, Jenny. If they're left till Monday, they make one cross, standing about : and it takes only a very few minutes, with hot water, to make all right. But there's one more thing I want to say, and then I have done."

"Let us hear it, Molly."

"What about your lads coming home Sunday morning for their clean shirts?"

"You know, Molly, as well as I do, they want a mother's wash round the neck, and a bit of talk ; and then, back to their master's for dinner."

"Yes, Jenny ; and I should be ashamed if the Lord Jesus were to come some Sunday morning, and find His day cut up in this way, and us only thinking about cleaning and feeding our bodies. You may depend upon it, we grieve His Spirit, in thinking more of our cows, and our shirts, and our dinners, than we do of Him."

"But the lads must have their clean shirts of a Sunday, some ways or another."

“When I was a young one, we had nine of us at home, and we all went into the tub every Saturday night. We began with the baby, so as it got to sleep early. I hope our farmers would not deny their young servants going home after milking, to get a good wash and a clean shirt. If they got over that on the Saturday, then they could go to church comfortably in the morning. I remember, when I was out at service, we never thought of missing our Church.”

“But, Molly, what’s that you were saying about the Lord coming?”

“Why, Jenny, He may one day come and take us by surprise. And if you were not ready to meet Him, how would you like to have nothing better to excuse yourself with, than this about the cow calving, or the dinner having to be cooked, or the lads to be dressed? I love my cow as much as ever you do yours: but it has no soul to be saved: so there, Jenny, think of that. And let this Mission be to you a new start on a new life. If so, ‘this month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.’” (Exod. xii. 2.)

CHAPTER II.

During the Mission.

MOLLY kept her word, and went daily to the meetings. As she was not so young as she used to be, she took a bit of tea and bread-and-butter with her, to save extra walking, and called on blind Sally to get a rest by the way. While the kettle was boiling, she read to her old friend, and told her all she could remember of the good things she had heard on the Lord's day. She felt no anxiety about what was going on at home. She knew Father would join her, and bring with him Dick and Joe; as well as Jessie, with her intended husband. These two had been betrothed some few years; but at present Jessie could not find it in her heart to leave her aged parents. Janet's son Josiah was the lucky man. He had begun to seek the Lord when yet a lad; and now he was content to await His time for the possession of his treasure. Josiah was much beloved, alike in his own home and in Jessie's; and he knew that the promised blessing would crown his faith and prayer with success, and that no good thing would be withheld from him, while walking with God. Jessie however was sent for to go and see Eliza, who was very ill.

Let us now go with her, and look in upon Jenny. Alas! she could not keep her promise to join Molly at the Mission services. Her daughter had been ailing for some time past, but she had not told her mother how bad she was. No need here to go into the sad tale of her sin and sorrow. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness.' O that she might even now, on her sick-bed, repent; and make that prayer of David her own, 'Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me!' She had fallen; and that, not through any sudden surprise on the part of the tempter. She always had a bold way of hanging about with the boys, when leaving school; and even in the Chapel her eye would wander after them. It is to be feared that the description given by Solomon in Proverbs vii. fits but too closely the case of poor Eliza. We would not speak harshly of this poor young girl, now that she is being nursed by the midwife; but the particulars of her story must be here given, as a warning to others. She had not numbered sixteen years when she fell. And what are we to say of Tom Wildrake—the only son of his mother, and she a widow? How will he feel, if he should hear the funeral bell go for Eliza? Yet there seemed to be very little hope of her recovery. A growing girl has no extra strength for the babe she is expecting. And then, her future prospects, should she be spared—what of them? To see one who is herself a mere child in years become a mother, is a thing that goes against nature. We have not

forgotten young Annie; who, when only fifteen years old, buried her firstborn. Then she went to service: but she still loved her sin better than her Saviour; and down, down, she fell, till her next babe was born in the workhouse. Ah! a piteous sight it was to see the mother and her babe, one Christmas afternoon, in that place. We read and talked and tried to pray; but there are times when we feel as if the heavens were as brass, whilst we are pleading with God for some hardened sinner, who looks on meanwhile with the callous smile, which says, 'My sin is dear to me, and I will seek it yet again.' It was with a heavy heart that we walked home that day, inwardly crying to the Lord that He would do that which we could not.

The bell is tolling its funeral knell for another soul passed away: and earth, heaven, and hell have all been watching what might be the result of timely warning. Is it for Eliza? Ah, Tom! if it be now too late for her repentance, it is at least not too late for yours. You have helped to be her soul's murderer: do not, I pray, add suicide to that sin, by being your own soul's murderer likewise. Go in solitude to the Lord, and seek His forgiveness. Tell all to Him;—how you have been the chief instrument in robbing His crown of one precious jewel, if Eliza did not seek and find pardon. Death has now ended the first stage of that young life.

We will now turn from this heartrending scene, to see what is going on in Molly's happy home.

"Mother," said Jessie, "do tell me what passed last night at the Mission service, when I was sitting up with poor Eliza."

"That reminds me, Jessie, that you will have a chance to go to the meeting to-morrow; for I have made a potato pie, which can be left in the oven, while I go and help Jenny to lay out her poor child's corpse. It is only right you should have some of the good things: and it is more fitting that I should be with Jenny, and do all I can. And do you help me, my dear lass, with your prayers, that it may not be in vain that the Lord has laid His correcting rod so heavily upon her."

"What, mother! you think Jenny did not look after Eliza as she might have done?"

"Yes, child. You remember when she first went to service at Farmer Jenkins', how slovenly her dress was, and how she used to expose the bosom which is now cold in death. And when the dairymaid there went home to be confined, Jenny only spoke of it as 'a misfortune,' and never, in my hearing, called it sin, as the Bible does. And no sooner had that girl recovered, than she went back to her place; for her mistress didn't mind waiting for her, because (as she said) 'Clever servants are scarce to get.' So you see, Jessie, what goes to make a good servant nowadays. If she can milk, and make cheese, that is the chief question; and it matters not whether she serves God or not."

"I should think, mother, young Wildrake must feel bad about this."

"Ah yes! he may well be beside himself, when he thinks he is the real murderer of the poor girl: for so he is. You may be sure he never really loved her, else he would have made her his lawful wife, and not have brought all this trouble upon her."

"And that's true for you, mother. But now tell me about the sermons yesterday."

"Ay, they were downright Gospel. The preacher laid the foundation grandly. He did not daub with untempered mortar; but told us how corrupt and bad we are by nature. He told us too what sin had done, and is doing in the world; and the sore mistake people make in hushing it all up with the lullaby 'Peace, peace,' where there is no peace. Then at the night meeting he read Isaiah i, and gave the wounded sinner the Gospel balm, and said the Great Physician must Himself apply it. I couldn't help thinking of poor Eliza, as the gentleman spoke of the Son of Man, 'Who came to seek and to save that which was lost.'"

"Yes, mother: and how nice that is where He says, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.'"

"Ay, lass: if only sinners could see their sin. But they will not come unto Jesus for life. But I must not keep you now. Go, my girl, and hear for yourself."

“May be Josiah will go along with me, mother.”

“Well, my lass, and if he wants to wed you at Easter, don’t put it off till we old ones die; but let us have the joy of seeing our children’s children, if it be the Lord’s will.”

“Well, mother, Josiah is worth the waiting, and I can bide the Lord’s time. We shall see.”

CHAPTER III.

A Talk about Confirmation.

MOLLY's two lads, Dick and Joe, and their cousins Bessie and Grace, had heard notice given for Confirmation, to be held in the summer. Nothing was said to the boys on the subject by their parents, who waited to see if any wish would be expressed on their own part, to confess Christ before the great congregation. Perhaps they knew that they would be all the more likely to think of the matter for themselves, if they were not urged by others. And so it proved.

"Mother," said Dick, one evening after work, when he had her all to himself, "Joe and I have been talking it over, and wondering you have said nothing to us about the Confirmation."

"Well, Dick, I thought perhaps your father would speak to you about it: for he was so blest in his own Confirmation, that he would know exactly how to help you to understand it. Ye see, I might have blundered, and so hindered ye both, in place of being a help. There's a deal o' wrong notions about it, both among the Church and Chapel folk."

"Why, you see, mother, somehow it's easier to tell what's inside of us to you, though Father

is so kind and knowing. We have all along from babies told you all our secrets."

"Ay, lad, go on in the old way, and ye will keep all right, with the Lord's help. But what's the secret ye have to tell now?"

"Why, it's just this, Joe says he would like to go and be confirmed, along with me. But Tom Wildrake and some other lads have been making all sorts of game about our becoming saints, and such like."

"Never you mind him, Dick. D'ye think, lad, the Master does not know all about it, and how to help you fight His battles? Have ye asked Him?"

"That we have right strong, mother, every night at bedtime. Ye see, of late we've had a little time together, before we go to sleep, talking and praying about it. I mind what Father was reading about David, when he faced the giant; how he went in faith with his stone and sling, and conquered in the name of the Lord; and we want just to face the lads that talk so big with the right word, and not to say anything about ourselves."

"Ay, lad, ye'll want the right word. Go to God for it: and then Joe and ye will both gain the victory, in the strength of Him whose enemies railed upon Him on every side. I'm right glad my boys make it knee-work; for it's little good we can get o' mere talk, if we don't pray too."

"But now, mother, let us go right into it. Tell me why the Bishop lays his hands on us in the service."

"Why, Dick, that was the way the Apostles used to do, when they received disciples into the Church of Christ (Acts viii. 14—17). So it's a rule of the Gospel, and we ought to follow it, same as every other rule."

"There's another thing we've had a good roasting over; and that is, having to go to the meeting once a week, and take our Bibles with us. It is all the jeer, that we shall have to say the Catechism, for all the world like the youngsters at Sunday school."

"That's because they have never been themselves, and they know nought about it. No, Dick; if they had ever joined in that hour's solemn reading and prayer, they wouldn't have dared to make a jeer of it. I was told how, at the last Confirmation, the Vicar spoke with all faithfulness to each one by himself, as well as questioning them all together. You may be sure he has some plan to go on, and suits what he has to say to each of them that come."

"Well done, mother; I see it now. And may the eyes of my understanding be opened more and more, that I may make it all plain to Joe. He is a good sort, and he often asks me things after we have sung our evening hymn in bed."

"I must see about Bessie and Grace, whether they have any wish to be confirmed. They will have their difficulties too, but of a very different sort from yours."

"How so, mother?"

"Why, in this, Dick. There's a number of

lasses that go out of mere form, just because they like to put on a new frock and pretty cap. Least-wise they don't always seem to wear a cap even. Three years ago, what they had on their heads looked to me more like a white leaf, with long net ends."

"For all the world like the veil as Lady Jane had over her, when she got married; eh, mother?"

"Ay, just that, lad. And for the life of us it did seem silly like, for poor folk to be dressed up so, like peacocks. I thought of the Ten Virgins, whose picture I had seen, going to meet the Bridegroom: and they must have been the foolish ones, who were dressed up so fine. I'm right sure finery is a folly in them that are going to make themselves over to the Lord, to be His for ever."

"Didn't they sing that hymn, 'Thine for ever,' mother?"

"To be sure they did: and if only body, mind, and spirit had been truly given up to Him, they would have dressed more like what Peter tells us to do, as women professing godliness (1 Pet. iii. 3—6). I should like to have a good hope that thy cousins have first given their hearts to the Lord, before ever I should wish to see them confirmed."

"Ye see, mother, in their home down yonder the world gets more thought than Heaven. And the lasses know this as well as we do; and so they can't rightly make up their minds whether any good could come of it, as long as they see things so different at home,"

"But do you know if they have thought about it at all?"

"Why, yes, mother. One Sunday as I met Bessie, I saw she had been a crying. So when I wanted to know what there was amiss, it came out that it was all along of this Confirmation. You mind we had a sermon, special to tell us what it meant, and what difference there was between them that are confirmed and them as haven't been. Well, Bessie she hankered like to go and hear that preaching; but, says she to me, 'Mother wouldn't let me go, because it was her turn to go out, and she wasn't going to give up to me for no such whimsies.' It was hard on her, wasn't it, mother?"

"We must pray for your aunt and uncle, Dick; or else we can't look for them to teach thy cousins what's right, before they have been taught themselves."

"When we were little chaps, we used to play a deal along with Bessie and Grace; but now we are getting to be big lads, somehow it don't seem as if we could go with them so much. Uncle isn't far off of being an old man, and his time here can't be so very long. And there's my aunt, she is so taken up with everything, that she don't seem to have the time to think about good things, and that."

"Ah, Dick! I'm afraid the cares of this life will shut many a tidy woman out of heaven. The Master bids you take heed, lest at any time

your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.”—(Luke xxi. 34.)

“But Uncle’s not a drinking kind of a man, mother.”

“No, lad, no; I don’t say he’s a drunkard: but sometimes he takes more than is good for him; and if he would make up his mind never to touch, taste, nor handle the unclean thing, he would grow out of caring for it. Anyhow your father never wants other drink but tea or butter-milk; and I hope you lads will ask the Lord for help to abstain from all fleshly lusts that war against the soul.”

“What does ‘surfeiting’ mean, mother?”

“That word has more in it than I can rightly tell you: but do ye ask Father about it when you’re helping him in the garden to-morrow night. He can tell you better than I can. But it’s getting late, my boy; so now let us go upstairs, and lay all before the Lord. And as to Father, why, he’s not a talking man, as you know: but don’t ye be afraid to ask him anything that comes into your mind, for he thinks a deal of you lads, and he’s a likely man to give you a bit of help where ye want it.”

“One thing more, mother, and then I’ll go to my roost. There’s Simon, he says we ought to go to confession before Confirmation, and he wants me to go with him. What does he mean by that?”

“ He means flat Popery, and full-blown Popery too. Don't ye have anything to do with all that. I'm too tired to begin about it now, but we'll have it all out to-morrow. Who would ha' thought I should ha' lived to see such days, with their talk of confession and such like? Well, good night, lad, and God bless ye ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

The Confessional.

NEXT evening, Joe was sitting at his tea without his brother. Dick had followed the advice which Molly had given him, and was now alone with his father; to whom the prayer and counsels of the night before had given the trusty boy the courage needed to open his mind. The fire tempted Joe to sit longer than usual; and his mother said to herself, Now's my time: it is so seldom that my younger lad tells me about his temptations or his tempters; and yet I don't believe he wants to keep anything back neither, for he must know how much I like to help my boys when they want it. Accordingly she made her approaches with shrewd caution.

"Joe, my boy, how did you like the opening service at the new church, that you went to? They call it St. Anne's, don't they? And why do they call it that?"

"Well, I'm a dull scholar, mother; but I can just tell you that much, and perhaps a little more. I listened hard, I can tell you; for there were a lot of things there as I couldn't rightly make out. They kept on a bowing and a bowing, and there

was a little chap swinging a thing like our best lantern : and then there was their profession."

"Procession, lad, ye mean."

"Yes, that's the word. It means singing of a hymn, I suppose, a walking up the church. Ye see, it was the christening of the church like: so says I to myself, I'll just get myself into a little light about it. There was a Parson they called the Priest; and he up and said as St. Ann was the mother of the Blessed Virgin; and if we pray as we ought to do to the holy Mother, we must remember her parentage, and seek her prayers and her mother's too, for all the Saints are willing to help us in Heaven."

"Are you certain, Joe, you did not mistake your ears? Why, that's just what the Romans say, as I've heard; and sure ye couldn't have heard that inside of one of our churches."

"Its just the real truth though, for all that; for I minded all as the Parson was a saying. Rare and smart he was too, I can tell ye, with all sorts o' colours about his dress, and golden crosses a shining beautiful. Ye see, 'twas a kind of a holiday, so the Parson was a wearing of his holiday clothes like."

"They do say such as he wears them every Sunday. But what else did he say?"

"He told us, if we didn't go and confess to him, God would not forgive us. Simon told me a tale about the Priest coming to see his mother, when she was laid very bad and light-headed, and that. Well, the Parson he pulls out a real little cross,

and he makes Sim's mother look at it all the time he was a saying of his prayers. So I said to Simon, says I, Jesus Christ never meant that way, when He was talking about Moses lifting up the serpent, (John iii. 14, 15); but it was believing on Him, saved us. That's what I've heard you say, mother."

"Right, my lad, ye've just hit the nail. But what about confessing to the Priest?"

"Simon he says that if I would go to confession, I should get all my sins cleared off. And then he talks that some sins are only little ones, and others deadly; and that when we do the little sins, the Priest can give us a dispensation. That's a hard word for me to think on, isn't it, mother? But I know it's the right one, for I got Simon to say it over, and spell it out for me. He says it means the liberty to do some things; and if we get that from the Priest, God will not be so hard upon us for them."

"And what did you say to that, Joe?"

"I said, it was a rotten thing to stand upon, telling you some sins are small in God's sight, and some great. That's not the way our old Bible teaches us, nor yet our church Parson. I take it, sin is sin all over; right and left, high and low: and conscience tells us so. And nought but the blood of Jesus Christ can wash it away, let alone dispensations. That's what I ha' learnt from you, mother; and from the teacher at Sunday school."

"And quite right too, Joe. And I hope ye had

another answer ready for him, my lad, about the Saints."

"I just thought of some texts I had learned when I went to Sunday school. So says I, Simon, if we must go to the Priest to confess, why was it Jesus said, 'Come unto Me'? And then I said, for as little of a scholar as ever I was, I knew he couldn't show me not so much as one verse, where Mary is said to pray for us in Heaven. I was fairly up in that, because our teacher had taken us through it; so said I, 'We have one mediator between God and man.' So there, Simon; tell me what is said about Mary or Ann, or any of the Saints now in glory, praying for us. No, I'll have none of it: and don't ask me to make confession to the Priest, when I can make it to the Lord Himself, and get my pardon free from Him."

"Stick to that, lad. And there's another thing. It don't seem to me anyways decent that all those questions I have heard talk of, should be either asked or answered. It's like to put young folks up to things that may be they would never ha' thought of."

"That's certain, mother. It's like stirring up that green pool at Lane End, where ye know the filth empties itself. And so I told Simon. But look, mother, the fire wants making up, or it will be cold welcome for Father and Dick; so I'll go fetch a log. Don't ye say nothing about this to Father to-night. I want to get speech of Simon again, before Father tackles him; for I know he

will go straight in to the lad, to save him if he can. Ye see, Sim's got no mother now, and she wasn't like you, mother, at no times; and as to his father, he don't care what he does, nor where he goes."

"The more need then that he is looked after by *your* father."

"That's true, mother: but I thought I'd like to see if I couldn't bring him along with me to our Protestant lecture, Wednesday evening."

"Well, the Lord make you like young Timothy, and 'stir up the gift of God' in you! And I pray, Grace, mercy, and peace be with you and Dick; and give to both of you more and more the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind!"

"I wonder what Timothy had been crying about. He must have had some trouble, for Paul speaks of his tears, and wanted to comfort him. But stay—there, I hear Father's step."

CHAPTER V.

The Lord's Supper.

DICK had now another subject of anxiety. Since his Confirmation, he had thought much of his dear Lord's command to His disciples, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' And here am I (he said to himself) disobeying it every time I turn my back upon His Table. I'll ask Mother to-night something about it. Accordingly after tea he followed her up the garden walk, where the bees had their own favourite flowers, and where Molly looked after them, in a quiet nook behind the old yew tree and holly bushes. There she was: and Dick had only to take her apron string, and his mother knew at once that he had something that either puzzled him, or was troubling his mind. It was his way of beginning any serious talk.

"Mother," he said, "I can't let Him stand out in the cold any longer."

"Who's that, lad? Who is it starving?"

"Well, I mean the blessed Lord has been knocking hard for some time, and asking me to take Him into my poor heart altogether. And when our Parson asks us to go and remember His dying love, it does seem hard to turn the cold shoulder on it. It cuts me right through when I count up the

many times the Master has said, 'Do this : ' and not once have I said, ' Yes, Lord. ' "

" And if ye have given Him yourself first, what is it holds ye back from letting Him have your poor services ? "

" Ye see, mother, if I was to go to the Sacrament, and then fell back careless like, what reproach it would bring on the Master's cause. And another thing : ye know some of them that did put their hand to the plough have gone back ; and after all, I don't see much difference in them that do go. "

" There, hold, Dick ! if you want examples, look into the Bible for them, and not into the village. And look to the Lord for help. This is a matter between Him and yourself ; and more's the pity ye don't see it. When ye come to die, ye'll not want to bolster yourself up with any goodness of your own. What ye'll want then, is to say as I once read in a tract,

' I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all ;
But Jesus Christ is my all in all. '

This I know : we must come empty, that we may be filled ; and must never feel content with our own short doings. "

" Grace told me to ask you whether she is too young to go to Sacrament. "

" That all depends on herself. Some are strong in faith, who are babes in years ; and I have known the roughest stone to make a polished jewel, when the Master has taken it in hand and chiselled it "

“But you don’t mean real babes, mother?”

“Well, I remember a wee boy, whose mother died when he was ever such a little thing. One might have thought he would have gone all wrong. But the Lord took him in his arms, and He taught him so much and so fast, that he was what we may call ripe and ready—ay, and longing—to go to the Lord’s Table, when only ten years old; and the Parson was too wise to refuse him.”

“But you don’t think it would do to let all children go, do ye, mother?”

“No, surely not: but there are exceptions, and some choice ones too. Sometimes the infant Christian has outstripped Mr. and Mrs. Little-faith. The Lord knows the heart, and whether we are willing to obey Him.”

“They do say at St. Anne’s, mother, that the Lord Jesus is sacrificed again for our sins, every time they have the Sacrament. But the folks that goes to St. Anne’s don’t call it that name; they call it Mass. Simon he told me as he went to early morning Mass as often as he could. So I asked Simon, what do ye mean by that? and he said to me, Oh! the Holy Sacrifice, says he; and begins a crossing of himself.”

“If ever I heard tell o’ such goings on! Why Dick, my lad, they people up at the new church are just all as one as the Romans. I’d be sorry if you was to go there often, Dick: I don’t hold wi’ running about from one place of worship to another; nor I never knew no good come of itching ears.”

"Never fear me, mother. It's mostly what I hear from Simon; and I like our Parson too well to care about going to any other place."

"And I hope my boy had something to say about all this to Simon."

"Well, mother, I did talk best I could to him. And I asked him, did he really believe all that; for I couldn't make out as any man that had a pair of eyes in his head could see things that way. So says he, That's just it, Dick; I only see with the eyes of the Church."

"Ay, no wonder he keeps dark. And so they all will, whatever they call themselves, who are looking to themselves or to their fellow-sinners, in the room of looking to the Lord for light, and asking Him to show them the way."

"Well, mother, will you have a talk with cousin Grace? She has nobody at home to help her; and you can do so a deal better than I could."

"That I will, Dick; do ye tell Grace to come and bring her sewing, after she has finished up the wash to-morrow. And then we'll see if we can make it plain to her: that if she loves the Lord that shed His blood for her, then she's a call to go to the Table, that she may think on Him the more."

"Mother, I was reading last night what Paul said he received of the Lord, about the Last Supper, in 1 Cor. xi. 23—26. And I thought I would ask you about what it says in the 29th verse. Look here in my Bible, I've marked it.

That word 'damnation' is enough to frighten anybody: and I don't mind telling ye, it frights me."

"Ay, and so it used to fright me too, when I was a lass; till our good old Minister showed us one day, that it meant all the same as 'condemnation' or reproof. It's one of them words, he told us, that have got changed in their meaning since the time when the Bible was wrote."

"Ah! I've heard say there's a many such like in the Bible."

"And then if ye read the next verse—that's the 30th—ye'll see something that might make ye right determined not to stay away from the Table. 'For this cause many are weak and sickly among you.' That means, among you that are Christians, and disciples of the Lord:—your souls grow weak and sickly, and like as if they were in a dead sleep, if ye do not obey your Master's command; 'not discerning the Lord's Body,' as having been offered up once for all."

"Thank ye, mother, I always get on with a bit of talk with you. And now I'll be off, for I expect Father will be wanting me."

CHAPTER VI.

*After the Mission :—A Happy Death
and a Happy Marriage.*

AGAIN the funeral bell has tolled. But this time its sound has carried with it no unmixed grief ; for no doubts or fears have been stirred by it, as to the condition of the departed one. Old Janet, who now has gone to her rest, was one that had walked with God from her youth ; and for her, to live was Christ, and to die was gain. She could not fail to be missed, not only by those left in her own home, but by all around ; having been a living epistle known and read of all men. Well might it be said of her, ‘She hath done what she could.’ Were any sick or in trouble, she would exhort them to go and cast their cares on Jesus ; if she found a neighbour in debt, or other difficulty, she would cheer her with sympathy and aid her with counsel ; while amidst the happy, none was happier than she. She was never without a kind word for everybody ; yet would she say nothing that might lull the worldling into a fatal security, as long as there was any corner in his heart which was still filled with worldly thoughts ; often reminding such persons that if they would

be where Jesus is, they must be His servants and followers (John xii. 26). All that a woman's hand could do was done with tender care by Molly, for the friend who had been so dear to her. The time might not be far distant, when another would have to do the same for her! Nor did this reflection distress her, nor disturb the calm tenour of her meditations. She knew in whom she believed, and had long enjoyed the blessed confidence that she was accepted in the Beloved, and that her name was written in the book of life; and in that confidence, her one desire was to be for ever with the Lord.

The little funeral party, after a cup of coffee, knelt in prayer before they left the cottage. They did the same on their return from the grave. Molly and Jessie spent the evening at Janet's old cottage, and were a great comfort to the old man and to his son Josiah. They occupied themselves in reading together some of Janet's favourite chapters from her well-worn Bible: and joined in singing her favourite hymn,

‘Just as I am.’

After tea Molly took up her knitting, while Jessie busied herself in clearing away the tea-things, and put a log on the fire. That was a funeral to be remembered; all were so calm in their sorrow, so joyful in tribulation. There was neither drink nor other excitement, but all was peace; nor was there one of that little company who could not then say—what it often takes a life-time to learn—‘Thy will be done!’

Jessie soon saw very clearly that she was needed in Josiah's home, for he and the old man missed the dear housewife and mother, and there was no woman living near their cottage. Seeing this, she quietly made her preparations to be married, God willing, on Easter Tuesday. Molly had good taste in dress, as in every other way; so she told Jessie what she thought would be becoming for her to wear at her wedding, seeing that they were yet in mourning for Josiah's mother.

"Pale grey Alpaca, my lass, with my white crape shawl; or a white jacket; and a sensible bonnet trimmed with white will be neat and cottage-like. And mind the shopman don't talk you over into buying any feathers nor flowers."

"No, mother, I should be sorry to make a guy of myself at any time: so much more at a time like that."

"True, lass. The other night at the meeting, the young women's hats looked like nothing so much as one great nosegay all up the room. Only 'twas a nosegay that hadn't any sweet smell. I suppose the foolish girls think to please the lads with their fine flowers and ribbons. The lads will do well to consider that these same artificial flowers may one day stand in the place of home comforts: and they may find themselves fathers of children decked out in gay finery, but without the healthy glow of such as are well looked after by a careful and tender mother. O Jessie, if mothers don't take trouble about their children, be sure the

tempter will. These are evil days, and it seems as if the perilous times are come."

"Why, mother, I can't quite see it as you do : it looks to me as if there were some very bright times before me."

"Ah! it's natural you should think so, lass. And may the Lord give you all the happiness you look for. But be careful, if ever you become a mother, to nurse and train your children for the Lord; and teach them all you can out of the Bible: and remember that if they are to learn the love of God, it must be through the love and tenderness of your own life. I hear there's not much time given in the schools to the Bible nowadays; and their three Rs do not take in my three Rs."

"What are yours, mother?"

"Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration."

"Well, mother, I want to know your wishes about going to the tea-meeting on Good Friday. I don't feel any drawing to it myself. The time's after the Church Service."

"Why, my lass, I had almost as soon go to another funeral, as see you take a part in tea-parties and such like, on a day when, if ever we do think on our dear Lord's Death, we ought to think on it then. Last Good Friday, as I was passing the chapel on my way from Janet's, I saw lots of boys and girls paired together up and down the lanes. They had no care to hear the speaking after the tea: and I made up my mind it was just a holiday with them, however well some might mean it. And the money got that night would be

but a poor set-off against the harm and mischief that would come to some of them out of that gathering. No, Jessie; don't ye go anywhere, only where ye can expect to meet the Master. Now I must be up and doing my part towards the wedding."

"O mother, what should I do without you?"

"Well, I must get the cake made for you: and while it is baking, I will pack up Grannie's best china, which I mean you to have; and the linen, and all the nick-nacks you have treasured up ever since you was a little thing. And whilst I'm doing all that, you know, you can sit still and be making your gown. The lilac print and the black-and-white are in the box already, and so are the white aprons, and a few odds and ends which I put together to save you thinking I could not spare them. And now I have my new warm cloak, you must take my large shawl, as well as the thin one, which lets in the cold too much for an old woman. So there, Jessie, get your needle and begin."

The days wore on, and Easter Tuesday came at last. The morning was bright and sunny; and the gaiety of Nature's aspect did but reflect the sunshine in each heart. They formed a goodly company when they all went to church together. There were the two fathers, John and Daniel; there was Molly with the two boys, Dick and Joe; there was cousin Bessie with her sister Grace; and last, not least, came Josiah and Jessie. A lovely sight it was, to see both young and old unite in asking God's blessing, which was echoed by their

own fervent wishes for the happiness and prosperity of the young couple. And when the service was over, the Clergyman added his blessing: for well he loved them both, having marked with pleasure that they had early chosen the narrow way; so that neither of them had caused him the sighs and tears and sleepless nights which he had known for others, whom he saw walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

On their return home, Molly told Dick and Joe to carry the baskets; and off they led the way up Primrose Hill. Their cousins followed gathering wild flowers, which were to adorn the bridal arch leading to the ling-thatched summer-house, in which the tea was to be spread. Posies were laid round, one for each of the party; the bride being distinguished by one of real apple-blossoms. On the cake which Molly had made, was laid a bunch of primroses, which had been coaxed to live longer than their usual time; and round it was twined a wreath of japonica mixed with moss. What a pretty sight, to meet the eyes of the old folks, when they neared the bower with Josiah and Jessie! And how pleasant was the sound, when they heard the voices of those within singing a wedding hymn. It had been composed by a clergyman, who never failed to rejoice with them that rejoice in the Lord. The voices of the brothers and cousins mingled in joyous harmony, as they sang to the well-known tune of the National Anthem the words that follow.

God bless the happy Bride,
O'er all her steps preside,
God bless the Bride !

Send her prosperity,
May she live near to Thee,
Oft in Thy presence be,
God bless the Bride !

Be Thou her husband's friend,
Thy peace his steps attend,
Be Thou his friend !
Oh ! bless the bridal pair,
Thy bounties may they share,
Safe keep them 'neath Thy care,
Be Thou their friend !

Help them to do Thy will,
All their best hopes fulfil,
Protect them still !
Oh ! may their household be
Trained as a family
To love and worship Thee ;
Protect them still !

Bless them with holiness,
Clothe them with righteousness,
O King of kings !
Train them by grace divine,
Till all in glory shine ;
Then shall our praise be Thine,
O King of kings !

When the last note had died away, Jessie went round and kissed them all for the Wedding Hymn so sweetly sung, and for the love which had spread their picnic feast. There were cheese-cakes, and puffs, and ham sandwiches, for which the walk up the hill had given to all the party an excellent relish. A fire was kept blazing

near, lest the old people should take a chill ; and on it the kettle was boiling for tea.

No one knew why it was that Dick slipped away from the rest of the merry group. During his absence the shades of evening began to gather ; reminding some there present of the latter end of her, whose departure from their midst was yet fresh in their minds. The sky was calm, and all Nature was in harmony with the glad quietude of the scene.

‘As the sun, when setting, grows more bright,
Till, slowly fading from our sight,
It leaves a stream of mellow’d light,
And grandly sinks to rest.’

Bessie and Grace packed up the remnants of the little feast ; and just as they had placed the teacups in the basket, they heard a whistle, and the sound of wheels. ‘Why, that is Dick’s whistle,’ they exclaimed : and, true enough, it was Dick, returned from fetching a spring-cart, to take the old people home more easily and quickly than their feet could carry them. He had stepped in at home too, to see that the fire should be burning brightly, to welcome them back to supper. It did not take them long to reach Molly’s cottage ; and after all were safely housed, and supper was over, they knelt down and thanked the Father of mercies for a very happy day. And then Josiah took Jessie to his father’s home. She had become his wife, and he loved her ; and (like Isaac of old) he was comforted after his mother’s death. (Gen. xxiv. 67.)

CHAPTER VII.

*After Thoughts :—a New Birth : a
Second Happy Death.*

"WILL ye believe it, Jenny? said Molly to her friend, 'Twelve months have come and gone since that blessed time of the Mission. The sowing and reaping have been done; but I fear with some it holds true that 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' (Jer. viii. 20.) It makes my blood creep when I think of those dear men of God standing up so valiantly for Jesus in that room those ten days, yet their sound by many was not heard. How is it with you, old friend? Depend upon it, we shall have a deal to answer for, in hardening our hearts when the Gospel is preached."

"Well, for my part, Molly, I don't care where I go, or who preaches, so the thing is done decent like, and our lads and lasses look as respectable as others. But the pity is, they want to dress up every day in their smart clothes, when they

go a neighbouring, or to the market or the shop. And they get themselves dusty so soon; and all the talk is about the fashion, and quarter-day must bring a change in feather or flower, and costume, as they call a short gown over a tight skirt."

"Well, never mind about the dress now, Jenny: more of that another time. I was talking about our souls: and it puzzles me how men and women, fathers and mothers, professing godliness, can take up with any teaching that comes to hand and see no difference between truth and error."

"What's amiss now, Molly? I can see you're not best pleased about something or another."

"The lads round here say they have a commission to preach, though they have only just begun the A B C of 'experience' in small letters, and have yet to learn the capital A of 'Assurance' and other truths of the Gospel. They think they have a call to teach us old folks, who heard such gracious truth from our late Pastor of blessed memory, when they were being rocked in their cradles, if indeed they were born at all. But so it is nowadays; the young ones set themselves up as teachers and preachers, till the world seems as if it was turned upside down."

"Stop, Molly. How can ye tell, who never heard the lads preach? We had six or seven of 'em at the camp-meeting not long ago. So young they were, it went to my heart to see

them, sure enough, come out so bold. There was one of 'em said, we must first come to the Cross, then to the Church of Christ, and so to Heaven."

"Then why did ye resist it, Jenny? Depend upon it, we must be born of the Spirit, and be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, before we get to Heaven; and our changed lives will soon tell of our changed hearts. I know there's a many that tries to keep in with both the world and religion. It looks respectable to dress up and go somewhere or anywhere on the Lord's Day: but for my part I mind what the Lord said, 'No man can serve two masters;' and, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and follow Me.' I take this to mean a consistent following, and never to be ashamed of the Master's cause, but live up to it, and fight for Him as good soldiers everyday."

"That sounds very right, Molly."

"But, to go back to the beginning of our talk. I am sore at heart at not seeing more fruit come of that spring blossom last April twelvemonths. There were some melted under the Word, but they went back. The corn has been sown and harvested, the fruit gathered, the potatoes got up; and it does seem so hard, there is more yield in the natural world than in the spiritual. It makes my old heart very sad, when I think the fields were white and the labourers ready, and souls still unsaved."

“Cheer up, grannie; we are not as bad as ye take us to be.”

“There it is: ye’ve got to find out how bad ye be before ye will mend. Ye are so puffed up with pride, and too conceited to bide teaching. But when the Lord gives you a sight of the natural heart, which is enmity against Himself, you will want nothing but His righteousness to cover ugly self: at least, so I have found it. And now the bell calls me to service; and as long as my old legs will take me, I hope to go and learn the truth as it is in Jesus.”

Molly had scarcely had her say, when Josiah came running as fast as his legs could carry him, to beg his mother-in-law to go and see Jessie. It was a fine day, and he did not stop to borrow a trap; as perhaps, in his excitement, he forgot that poor old Molly could not travel as fast on foot as she used to do. However, his strong arm helped her, and his kind care made her rest every now and then, on their way to Rose Cottage. A little rosebud had just blossomed there; and the happy wife had become a yet more happy mother. Nurse Smith had done all to make things comfortable, knowing that for old Molly the walk would be quite enough of itself. When grannie saw Jessie and her babe, she felt almost like old Simeon blessing God, and ready to depart in peace; when, like Anna in the Temple, she gave thanks, and spake of Jesus. She kissed the babe, and leaning over her daughter said:

“Well, Jessie dear, we will not talk about

everything and nothing; but just speak to God. Our hearts are full, and ye must keep still." And then the old woman knelt down by the bedside, and very humbly praised the Lord for this new mercy, and prayed for blessings such as He only could give. It was a look of love which beamed on that sunny face, and reflected itself where it rested.

At the month's end dear old grannie was spared to take her daughter to be churched. It was no mere formal ceremony to either of them. In bygone years they had often joined in the same service in behalf of friends and neighbours; and now, how real it seemed to themselves!

When six weeks old, Baby was baptized, and dedicated in God's House to His service. Little Daniel's sponsors were not thoughtless, as is too often the case, but were praying ones. The Christening party finished the day in prayer and praise, and the three aged grandparents all remembered that their time on earth could not be very long, as each had been spared to a good old age. They felt that they must give all diligence to keep their lamps burning; not neglecting the trimming of them, and filling them with fresh oil.

* * * * *

It was poor old John's turn next, to praise God for another birthday. It was the day of his loving wife's birth into her heavenly home. For ever with the Lord! Amen; so let it be! Right

thankful was the old man, that he was spared to close those dear eyes, which had never refused the tear of pity to the sorrows and the sins of all. He said it was just like the good Lord and Master, to take her so graciously to himself; and His own words, said he, shall mark her resting-place, 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.' (John xii. 26.)

THE END.

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